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ADDRESS

TO THE

KA SOCIETY OF HIPPOCRATES;

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BY JOHN T. J. WILSON, F. V. P.

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AN ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

IT is with peculiar pleasure, that I refer you to the appropriate and systematic oration of my friend and predecessor, (Dr. Miller) for more minute and particular details than I am prepared to give you.

In relation to the biography of the founder of this society, the noble, the enlightened, and patriotic Hippocrates, I consider it unnecessary for me to repeat what has been so often recited to the interest and admiration of mankind, and by men too, who, whilst they described, imitated his virtues, and shared with him the plaudits and acclamations of the world.

But with whatever enthusiasm and vehemence I may present to you the Father of Medicine, as a model of perfection in man, I nevertheless renounce the rage that every tyro manifests, in recurring to antiquity for all that dignifies and adorns his profession; while, unmindful of circumstances, he passes unnoticed the virtues, labours, and researches of his own times and his own country.

Man is the same in every age, the child of circumstances, the idol of creation; and if he is immortal he must certainly progress in the process of development, towards other and higher perfections.

The objects of our Society, so laudable and honourable to humanity, are known by you all to embrace honour, science, friendship and virtue; honour is its shield, science is its guide, friendship is its surety, and virtue its reward. We have mutually pledged, and the obligation is irrevocable, that we will live in peace and amity with each other, and that neither envy, jealousy, nor low ambition, shall mark our intercourse or tarnish our lives. We declare that even indigence shall be a blessing to the poor, and that the orphan shall not cry, nor the widow mourn, where we can comfort. We unite to promote the welfare and happiness of man, through purity of motives, and without show or ostentation.

No subject presents itself with more lively interest on this occasion than that of the relations of man; and therefore, I proceed to the history of some of those original and primitive principles of his nature out of which they arise.

From the susceptibilities of the human heart are derived the principles of morality and the laws of society. Connected by his feelings with whatever he can love and pity, admire or adore, man is saluted by the variously modulated voice of nature; the sun-beam separated into its primitive elements,

gives beauty and sublimity to the objects of vision, and each sense draws from its own source the riches of perception, the luxury of thought.

He is designed in all things well,
 Hope is his Heaven, and fear's his hell;
 His senses through perception tell,
 Nature's beauty.

His globe's a point, his life's a span,
 A flame which kindling breezes fan;
 Like furnace coals, alternate wan,
 Then vivid glows.

But however transient this passing scene, it still presents him with all that can charm his senses, heighten virtue and morality, minister to his necessities, or gratify his cupidity; the arched rock, the vaulted cave, the limped streamlet, and the pearly dew-drop on the spear of grass, awaken love, sympathy, retirement, and ease, whilst the beautiful rivulet, the majestic river and sublime ocean, excite adoration and reverence, waft the products of his soil to distant realms, and return their luxuries and arts.

The individual whose life is exemplary, and whose every act is promoted by philanthropy, virtue, honor, and morality, like the primitive element of a pure, transparent chrystal, unites by its affinities, with the virtuous and honourable, to form the perfect square.

The tall monarch of the forest, defoliated and stript of his stout arms and delicate tendrils,

once the covering of earth's rich vest, may for a while the storm and tempest brook; but must ere long yield to dissolution, and become the subject of new affinities; but the virtuous man, even on the verge of temporary annihilation, casts a lingering look and parting smile upon the past, then fondly anticipates a future existence, an immortal bliss.

Contemplate the declining sun, and see the richest emblem of the Christian's death.

"On the horizon he lingering *stands*,
To gaze upon the world awhile;
And ere he sinks beneath the flood,
To bless it with a parting smile."

To our emotions we are indebted for all that charms and delights us; without these combining and blending with the perceptions and conceptions that excite them, the inanimate universe would be destitute of that attractive beauty, which gives birth to the richest images of poetry; the tranquility of the ocean, when the storm is hushed to silence and rests on its smooth bosom, would not be the semblance of peace and repose, but death; the gentle murmuring of the trickling streamlet could not give music, but harshness to our ears, and even the pending tendrils of the drooping willow would seem a mere contiguity of particles, destitute of loveliness, devoid of interest. It is not alone in the objects of perception that we find pleasure and delight; but even the severest forms of intellection offer dainties that do not pall upon the sense, and

give fruition without satiety. Can we imagine more extatic feeling than that which fired the soul of Milton, when passing as it were beyond the analogies prescribed to the beings of his order, he arrived almost at the circumference of human intellect, and caught the glimmerings of truths too sublime to be conceived, too dazzling to be felt? What eloquence can paint the devotion of those prominent geniuses—

*“Whose altars are the mountains and the ocean,
Earth, air, stars, all that springs from the great
whole,
Who hath produced and will receive the soul?”*

Our whole life is a chequered alternation of immediate, retrospective and prospective emotions. At one time, cheerfulness, like the friendly vision of a midnight dream, recalling pleasures that are past, gives to inanimate objects its own bright image, and diffuses over nature a pure serenity. At another, melancholy, the tenant of the soul, whose gloom clouds and obscures the brightest prospects, and covers with a morbid hue the new-born beauties of the spring, saddens every scene, whispers in every breeze, murmurs in every rill, and—

*“around her throws
A death-like silence and a dread repose.”*

That man is social, is indisputable and self-evident. View him as we may, he presents the most intimate and indissoluble relations; to his God he

owes the sacrifice of the heart; to his fellow-man, all that he himself can exact; and to inferior animals, humanity and protection.

The science of physics is but a knowledge of the aptitudes of things, as capable or susceptible, affecting or affected; but that of man comprehends the relations of every species and of every order. To study human nature, therefore, we must not retire to the sequestered grotto, and consider men's passions like tornadoes, only in their ravages; no, we should rather view them with philanthropic pride, in their purity and dignity, as conducive to social existence. I would ask, what it is, but the relation they bear to our susceptibilities, that gives a charm to the objects of this visible world, and impresses us with the sublimity of their origin, the fitness of their order, and the perfections of their harmony? What is it, but the assurance that there are within me the elements of those feelings which gladden or disturb, that prompts you to address your hopes and fears to my responsive soul? It is identity of nature, it is congeniality of mind. When I contemplate the philosophy of nature, and discover, as far as I am capable, the adaptation of parts—the greatest contrasts forming the most perfect harmonies, and the striking analogies that give rise to imagery and invention, something peculiar to my social being prompts me to impart to the companions of my youth these lively affections, these vivid feelings.

The suggestions of youth are the most pleasing,

the most permanent. How fondly does the sage, whose head is silvered o'er with age, and the conservative power of whose physical system scarcely repels the attacks of the assailing elements, look back as it were through life's short vista, dark indeed at its entrance, but gradually brightening until it expands into the brilliancy of youthful recollection: How happily does he cherish the memory of the past as the surest pledge of the future! Since such is our condition, we should improve those tendencies that are already strong, and cultivate those affections which as yet are neither weak nor perverted. In this respectable Society, where principles are characterized by love and friendship, we are to form such associations, and exercise such sympathies, as will distinguish us from the low, ignoble vulgar, whose calumnies, like the ravings of the maniac, but show their own infirmities, whilst they enhance our merit and promote our rank.

It becomes my duty to say something in relation to the Medical profession, and I need barely remark, that notwithstanding the base impositions of empiricks, every age has been enlightened by the discoveries of physicians, and every art and every science enriched by their labours. Metaphysics and Ethicks, those systems which teach the nature and duties of man, are reduced by their indefatigable researches from the scholastic jargon of abstract phraseology to the indisputable principles of material and mental physiology. By them the secret laws of nature are almost made subservient to

order and arrangement; and while politicians enact, and moralists theorise, our profession is first to minister comfort and solace to the sick and the afflicted, and, unbiassed by lucre or sordid avarice, to visit the obscurest cottage, the meanest hovel. Like a garden of cultivated flowers, imparting their mingled fragrance to the desert air, the medical faculty extend those charities to the widow and the orphan which ennoble man, and render him worthy of immortality.

Brothers, be it ours to know, that while we live in the feelings and affections of each other, the storm of persecution may blow, and the tempest of adversity beat, but we will stand united and unshaken on the broad basis of the principles we profess. Surrounded as we are with the blessings of life, the fruitions of sense, with mental enjoyments and moral elevation, and beholding in creation the elements of poetry and the principles of philosophy, which require but the power of inventive genius to exhibit the beauty of the first and the utility of the second, how multiplied are our incentives to industry and exertion!

In imagination I paint the innumerable links of that chain which binds our souls responsive, and connects them with the Spirit of the Universe! The conjecture however fanciful is not improbable, that here may germinate the elements of virtue and of usefulness, and that even within these walls may glimmer, unperceived, the matin twilight of vigorous intellection.

Father, to you is due the honour of having revived that which the revered Hippocrates commenced; his bright example, like the fabled river of Greece, whose unmixed waters emanate from the briny deep, though lost to the succeeding ages of ignorance and barbarism, again glimmers as a far distant beacon, and invites to intellectual and moral improvement. To you each successive generation shall ascribe the dignity and elevation of the medical character, and on each revolving anniversary, when thy departed spirit rests in peace, they will offer to thy memory, as the last tribute of respect, the warmest expressions of affection.

Immortal Hippocrates! around thy head in rich effulgence shines the bright halo of fame, and whilst thy example fires the souls of youth, the oath which thou didst prescribe to the pupils of thy care shall be to thee *monumentum perennis aere*.

My theme is enrapturing at every stage of my progress; bright scenes and prospects rise and receive additional splendour from the apparent indistinctness of the past. Every page of Medical Biography teems with characters who have rescued the human family from diseases whose ravages almost threatened its extinction. Science mourns their departure, and their memory is embued with the tears of humanity.

Associates, may you imitate their examples, and ever remember "non doctior sed meliori imbutus doctrina."

